

# Great Plains and Midwest Climate and Drought Webinar Series: Evaluation Report

NOVEMBER, 2014

## Key Findings

- *More than 70% of survey respondents said the webinars increased their capacity to use climate information*
- *Almost all shared the information with someone*
- *About 1 / 3 used webinar information in decision-making or planning*
- *Of those who used the information in decision making or planning, more than 90% said it helped them make a better decision*
- *Of those who used the information in decision making or planning, about 20% knew the financial benefit of their decisions, primarily related to agricultural production*
- *About 75% said they liked the geographic focus of the series, and most would like to see it continue, to address drought, water supply, climate trends, seasonal climate outlooks, and flooding.*

NOAA and partner agencies launched a series of webinars in November 2011 to inform clientele along the Missouri River about potential climate impacts including flooding and drought. Since then, the webinars have expanded to cover the northern Great Plains and the Midwestern U.S.

To learn about the effectiveness of the webinars as a way to communicate climate outlooks and conditions, two online surveys of participants were conducted. Fifty-six individuals responded to a 2012 survey and 90 responded to a 2014 survey.

Respondents said they appreciated the webinar format; the slides, charts, maps and illustrations; and the downloadable PDF summaries. They found the webinars to be effective for “explaining complex climate info in everyday layman’s terms”, “explaining the nuances of the graphs and data”, and “providing contacts for specific questions.”

Almost all respondents said they shared the webinar information with another person or group or made a presentation using the information. About one-third of respondents said they had used webinar information to make or confirm a decision, or to develop or implement a plan.

*More than 90% of those who reported using the information in decision making said that the webinar information helped them make a better decision.*

Respondents said the decisions affected the following sectors (from most reported to least reported):

- Water supply or quality
- Society and public health
- Farming
- Fish and wildlife
- Livestock
- Energy
- Fire
- Recreation and tourism
- Transportation (2014 Survey)

More than 70% of all respondents:

- increased their understanding of where to find and how to use climate information,
- increased their interest in, and ability to incorporate the information into decisions, and
- increased their interactions and exchange of information with other stakeholders (2014).



In the 2012 survey (following the flood year), survey respondents provided examples of decisions made or actions taken, including:

- reservoir operations decisions,
- preparation for flood response,
- timing of planting and pricing of crop,
- water budgeting and forecasting, and
- planning research activities.

In the 2014 survey (following drought), respondents provided some different examples of decisions made or actions taken, including:

- develop and trigger drought responses,
- develop research programs in public health and fish and wildlife, and
- develop plans for energy production, disaster response, and river transportation and management.

Of those who used the information in decision-making (n=33, 2014 survey), about 20% were able to quantify the financial benefit of their decision-making to some degree. Examples included:

- helping local producers make decisions on holding, selling, dry-lot feeding of cow herds, stocking rates, and livestock feed availability (\$10,000-\$50,000),
- promoting reduced tillage (\$50,000-\$100,000 impact),
- determining office operational structure (over \$1,000,000).

*Overall, the webinars have been fantastic. [The leaders] are to be commended for explaining complex climate info in everyday layman's terms so that as managers we can use the data for making management decisions. I hope these continue! (2012 Survey)*

About 62% either didn't know the financial benefit of the decisions they made using information from the webinar series or didn't think the benefit was financial. Respondents were unable to put a dollar figure on the benefit of developing or triggering management options related to air pollution control policy, river operation policy, emergency management, research, electricity generation, water supplies, fire fighting, or setting grazing rental rates (Figure 1).

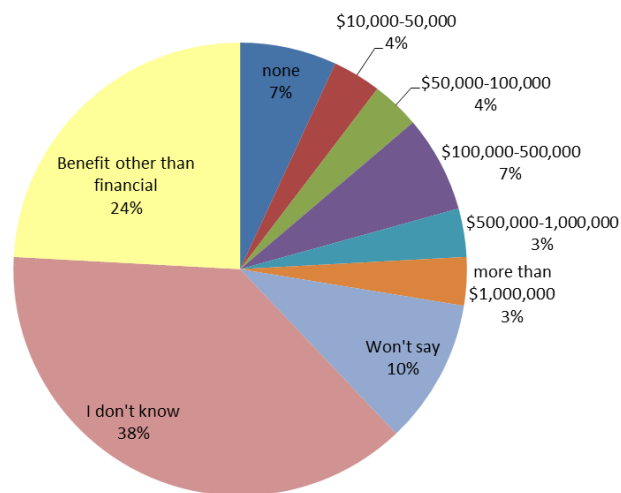


Figure 1: Reported Financial Benefits of Decisions (2014 Survey)

The webinar series is a joint effort of NOAA through the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), and many partners including: the American Association of State Climatologists (AASC), the High Plains Regional Climate Center (HPRCC), and the Midwest Regional Climate Center (MRCC), the National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC), the National Weather Service (NWS), the National Climatic Data Center (NCDC), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Joint Agricultural Weather Facility (JAWF).

Respondents to the 2014 survey included representatives of federal, state, and Tribal agencies, universities, businesses, local governments, non-governmental organizations, individuals, and others such as media (Figure 2).

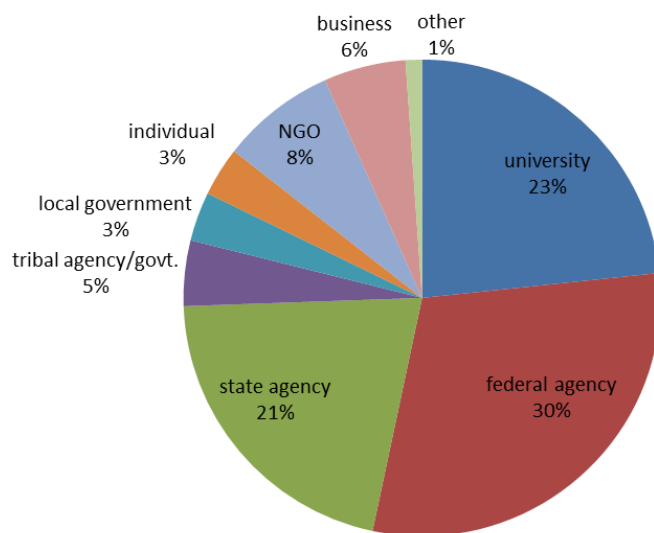


Figure 2: Respondents to 2014 Survey (n=90)

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To register for future webinars, visit:

<http://drought.gov/drought/content/regional-programs/regional-drought-webinars>

